

Collegeville Borough to Ask Residents for Their Thoughts on the Best “Look and Feel” for our Main Street

To discuss the best "look and feel" for Main Street, the Borough of Collegeville is kicking off a program of Community Engagement, focusing first on Main Street's 400 block. At the end of August, a joint public meeting of the Borough Council and Planning Commission will be held to get the members' views. Then in September, the public will be invited to share their views, ideas and any concerns through a number of public meetings and information sessions. Sessions will be accessible both in-person and on-line.

The Community Engagement sessions will be posted on the Collegeville Borough website <https://www.collegeville-pa.gov/>, the CEDC website <https://www.collegevilledvelopment.org/>, on social media and borough signs.

Background

In January, 2018, Collegeville Borough established the Borough Business Development Committee (BDC) to look into revitalizing Collegeville's Main Street as well as our borough shopping centers and Third Ave. business districts.

Our Main Street currently extends from Second to Fifth Aves. But in the 400 block (from 4th to 5th Aves.), there are only about 10 food, retail and service businesses interspersed among residences.

This block also has different zoning on the two sides of the street. On the south (Marzella's Pizza) side, the block is zoned Residential/Main Street Commercial; on the north (Borough Hall) side, it is zoned Residential/Office. The Borough will be reaching out to the owners of the homes on the north side of the street to discuss

adding a zoning overlay. They can keep their Residential/Office zoning, but have the option of adding the Main Street Commercial option if they want to sell their property or open a business. This will increase their development options as well as the value of their property.

We are fortunate that in the 400 block Ursinus College owns seven properties. The College is interested in leasing the first floors as commercial spaces for the businesses we hope to attract. This will "fill out" and extend our Main Street up to the campus. (They also own Commonwealth Hall and Hobson Hall in the 500 block between 5th Ave. and Trinity UCC church where this could apply to as well.)

Family Friendly College Town

At this time in our planning, our goal is to create a "College town" feel in this block adjacent to Ursinus College that will appeal to both students and residents, with unique retail and more food establishments.

In discussions with residents and business owners, the BDC has concluded that the best positioning for Collegeville's Main Street is "family-friendly": a destination that should include things to do and entertainment options for young and older kids through adults.

Ursinus College has opened up their campus and events to the community. We see the richness of the College's music, theater, art, dance, lectures and more as one of the most valuable assets to Collegeville Borough. We see the level of attractions they provide as helping to position Collegeville Borough as a destination.

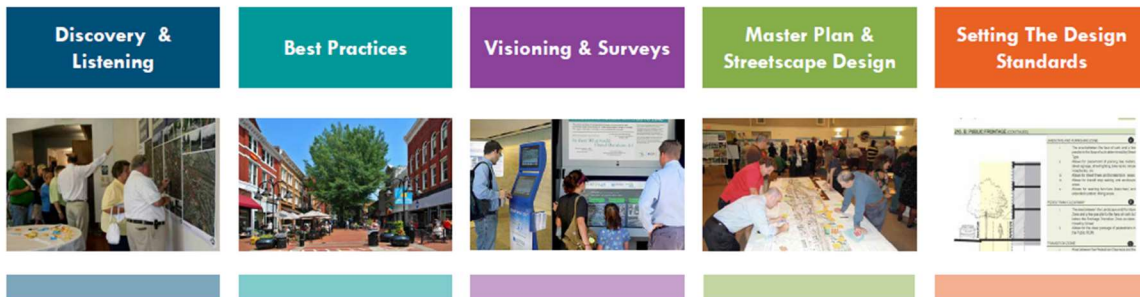
Ursinus College has taken the lead in revitalizing Collegeville's Main Street by building the Schellhase Commons at 5th Ave. and Main St. which opened to residents this year. The bookstore and Café 2020 serving Starbucks Coffee is now open to residents, as is the campus.

The Placemaking Process

At our July Business Development Committee meeting, Mark Evans from Derck & Edson outlined the process for involving the community in determining what it is that we want on the 400 block of Main St. This involvement will then help to determine the master plan and streetscape design, which leads to setting the design standards and the finalization of the Main Street Commercial (MSC) zoning. Currently Mike Lowry of the Montgomery Planning Commission is leading us in this process.

The Placemaking Process

*Our process for preparing community-supported
visions, master plans, and designs for vibrant places*



The Placemaking Process

1: Discovery & Listening

DATA COLLECTION

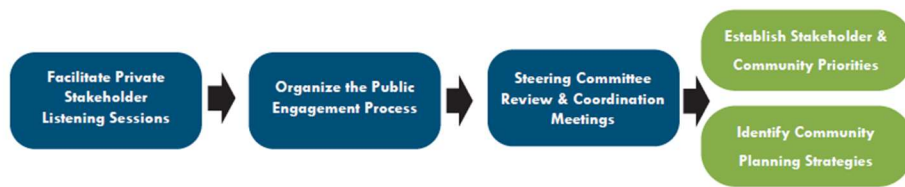
- Collect Site Data
 - geo-spatial data
 - pedestrian networks
 - strategic plans
 - economic development strategies
 - transportation plans
 - contact lists
 - municipal plans
- Collect Regulatory Data
 - street ownership
 - zoning standards
 - street design standards
 - funding sources



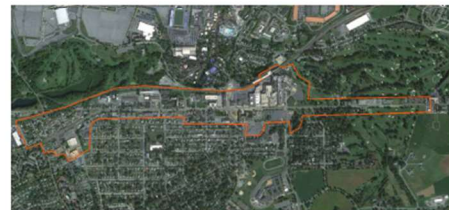
Appoint the Steering Committee

LISTENING

- What are your community's goals & objectives?
- Which groups are interested in participating in this placemaking process?



Stakeholder Meeting



Define the Study Area



Envisioning A New Main Street

When you close your eyes and picture our new Main Street, what does it look like? What is the “look and feel” that you envision for our Street? While we all want to keep our small town, village-like feel, what can we reasonably expect will have to change to achieve our vision?

Although many of us love the older buildings, unfortunately it is more cost effective, faster and easier to tear down an existing building and build a new, larger, mixed-use building (restaurants and retail on the first floor, housing and/or office above) than to keep and renovate each house. A new building will make better use of the property footprint and better enable us to address the streetscape. And the new buildings can be designed with features from the older buildings on the street to retain the town's character.

We learned in our first attempt in 2019 that older buildings can cost as high as \$1 million for the renovations needed to bring the building up to code and provide the room size, function and parking needed by today's businesses. “When the College was trying to accommodate moving Steel City Coffeehouse into one of their former dorms. . . with all the building code requirements and the updates needed, it was prohibitively expensive,” said Maureen Cumpstone, Entrepreneur in Residence, at

Ursinus College's U-Imagine Center. "Development needs to be financially feasible for building owners and businesses to take it on."

Despite the financial challenges that have prevented revitalization in the borough, do you love the way Main Street looks with the old buildings, similar to Skippack? Almost all of them are over 100 years old and present the same problems Ursinus encountered. Or do you see a Main Street something like Lansdale or Ambler with a mix of old and new?

What Collegeville Needs for a Successful Main Street Business District

- More restaurants, entertainment and retail rather than service businesses. Over 60 percent of our businesses are hair salons, fitness studios, and medical and insurance offices
- More people patronizing businesses both during the day and the evening. We need some office presence in order to have lunchtime clientele for the restaurants, along with our local and regional residents who have dinner there.

Pete Staz, Entrepreneur and Urban Developer told us: "It is challenging for developers to bring retailers into town. What retailers want is to look at your Main Street and see that there are people on the street. They want to know, "What type of business is being conducted during the day, at night, and on weekends? What is the quality of the commercial spaces for lease?"

400 Block Design Challenges

Uniformity and Outdoor Spaces

The buildings are not uniformly set back from the sidewalk. Some have large front yards. For a successful commercial district, the front of the building should be closer to the street.

The space between a number of the buildings will require infill with another building or the creation of a usable outdoor space to keep people interested enough to entice them to continue walking down the street. We have learned that the more building density on Main St., the more people will patronize the street.

Pedestrian Safety

Montco Planner Mike Lowry said that "It is important that traffic calming be part of (the) revitalization. Your Main Street is located on Ridge Pike, a state road with a 30 mile an hour speed limit: but cars go faster than that. The speed of the cars can make eating outdoors an unpleasant experience."

Mike adds, "In order for people to come up and walk Main Street, you need good pedestrian design. No one is comfortable with box trucks whizzing past." With the speed of the traffic on Main Street, pedestrians would feel safer with the sidewalks moved further back from the street and widened, or a parking buffer added.

Parking and Wayfinding

There is not enough parking available in the 400 block. Currently parking is available on both sides of Main Street but the parking spaces are not marked. Many successful downtowns work out arrangements with lot owners for shared lots among businesses. With the recruitment of additional businesses, Collegeville will also need to emphasize on-street parking, and provide wayfinding signage for lots hidden behind buildings and amenities.

Streetscaping

Over the past 20 years, the Borough has received grants for streetscapes along Main Street from 1st to 4th Ave. The streetscape is missing in the 400 block. Streetscaping on this block would continue the old-fashioned street lamp look that signifies a Main Street business district in communities everywhere, and connect the district with the streetscape in front of the Ursinus campus.

Crosswalk Markings

Crosswalk markings and signage along the length of Main Street should be highly visible, consistent and kept in good repair. When necessary, they should include yield to pedestrian signage.

Some Thoughts from Members of the Borough's Business Development Committee

- Planning Commission Member Alex Tweedie: "There are buildings on Main St. that matter and buildings that don't matter. I think we want to catalogue the buildings on Main St. that we want to keep. What buildings you save can also be dictated by what you can do with the building." Some are harder to redevelop than others. There are few buildings on Main Street with large, open spaces.
- Maureen Cumpstone: "Since our Main Street is actually only (a few) blocks, ... we need to maximize every property we have to have a critical mass of retail and restaurants."
- Council Member Valarie Beckius: "If we ... bring in a developer to add new buildings to our Main Street, they don't have to look new. They could have an old look. In Lititz, they have kept that old look. We should just work to preserve the jewels of Collegeville's Main Street."
- Resident Dean Miller: "I have lived on Main Street's 300 block for 30 years. Don't forget that some of us live on Main Street and it is our home, so please think about us in your planning."
- Core Development's Pete Staz: "The rule of thumb is that retail follows retail, so it is really important to attract destination retail and restaurants that attract others—and then (your Main Street) starts to build."
- Pete adds, "What is exciting is that the College owns so many buildings. When you have control of the land, development can happen sooner. Ursinus College is motivated to make it happen. After the College starts the development, we will generate foot traffic very quickly, and then we can expand."

What Are Your Thoughts?

We'll be reaching out to residents to ask you for your thoughts on issues such as those discussed above, along with others, such as:

- **Civic Space**

The Ursinus U-Imagine student study highlighted the importance of having an “anchor” which attracts people to your town; often it was a public or civic space where events could be held. Can we create a community gathering space on or near Main Street?

- **Entertainment Options**

What entertainment options would you like to see us recruit to Collegeville to attract families?

- **Historic Assets**

How can we optimize our historic assets in unison with Trappe and the Collegeville and Perkiomen Valley Region to promote our Main Street?

- **Housing Alternatives**

How can we use our vacant spaces to find new uses as sought-after lofts and interesting housing alternatives? One of Collegeville Borough’s strengths is its demand for housing due to its proximity to technical and other well-paying jobs. We should consider this for spaces that may now not be rentable as retail, such as the vacant Sears Store. Such spaces can also be turned into shared office or other business spaces.

-- Cathy Kernen, Chairwoman of the Borough’s Business Development Committee